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Mr. C——ns's DISCOURSE OF Free-Thinking,

Put into plain *English*, by way of

ABSTRACT,

FOR THE

Use of the Poor.

By a Friend of the AUTHOR.

LONDON,

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BRITISH MUSEUM

A
DISCOURSE
OF
MR. C——NS'

OUR Party having failed, by all their Political Arguments, to re-establish their Power; the wise Leaders have determined, that the last and principal Remedy should be made use of, for opening the Eyes of this blinded Nation; and that a short, but perfect, System of their Divinity, should be publish'd, to which we are all of us ready to subscribe, and which we lay down as a Model, bearing a close Analogy to our Schemes in Religion. Crafty designing Men, that they might keep the World in Awe, have, in their several Forms of Government, placed a Supream Power on Earth, to keep human Kind in fear of being Hanged; and a Supream Power in Heaven, for fear of being Damned. In order to cure Mens Apprehensions of the former, several of our learned Members have writ many profound Treatises in Anarchy; but a brief compleat Body of Atheology seemed yet wanting, till this irrefragable Discourse appeared. However it so happens, that our ablest Brethren, in their elaborate Disquisitions upon this Subject, have written with so much Caution, that ignorant Unbelievers have edified very little by them. I grant that those daring Spirits, who first adventured to write against the direct Rules of the Gospel, the Current of Antiquity, the Religion of the Magistrate, and the Laws of the Land, had some Measures to keep; and particularly when they railed at Religion, were in the right to use little artful Disguises, by which a Jury could only find them guilty of abusing Heathenism or Popery. But the Mystery is now revealed, that there is no such Thing as Mystery or Revelation; and though our Friends are out of Place and Power, yet we may have so much Confidence in the present Ministry to be secure, that

those who suffer so many Free Speeches *against their Sovereign and themselves to pass unpunished, will never resent our expressing the* freest Thoughts *against their Religion; but think with* Tiberius, *That if there be a God, he is able enough to revenge any Injuries done to himself, without expecting the* Civil Power *to interpose.*

By these Reflections I was brought to think, that the most ingenious Author of the Discourse upon Free Thinking, *in a Letter to* Somebody, Esq; *although he hath used less reserve than any of his Predecessors, might yet have been more free and open. I considered, that several* Well-willers *to* Infidelity *might be discouraged by a shew of Logick, and multiplicity of Quotations, scattered through his Book, which to Understandings of that Size might carry an appearance of something like* Book-learning, *and consequently fright them from reading for their Improvement: I could see no Reason why these great Discoveries should be hid from our Youth of Quality, who frequent* White's *and* Tom's; *why they should not be adapted to the Capacities of the* Kit-Cat *and* Hannover *Clubs, who might* then *be able to read Lectures on them to their several* Toasts: *And it will be allowed on all Hands, that nothing can sooner help to restore our abdicated Cause, than a firm universal Belief of the Principles laid down by this sublime Author.*

For I am sensible that nothing would more contribute to the continuance of the War, *and the Restoration of the late Ministry, than to have the Doctrines delivered in this Treatise well infused into the People. I have therefore compiled them into the following Abstract, wherein I have adhered to the very Words of our Author, only adding some few Explanations of my own, where the Terms happen to be too learned, and consequently a little beyond the Comprehension of those for whom the Work was principally*

cipally intended, I mean the Nobility and Gentry of our Party. After which I hope it will be impossible for the Malice of a Jacobite, High-flying, Priest-ridden Faction, to misrepresent us. The few Additions I have made, are for no other use than to help the Transition, which could not otherwise be kept in an Abstract; but I have not presumed to advance any thing of my own; which besides would be needless to an Author, who hath so fully handled and demonstrated every Particular. I shall only add, that though this Writer, when he speaks of Priests, desires chiefly to be understood to mean the English Clergy, yet he includes all Priests whatsoever, except the antient and modern Heathens, the Turks, Quakers, and Socinians.

The LETTER.

SIR,

I Send you this Apology for *Free Thinking*, P. 3.
without the least hopes of doing good, but purely to comply with your Request; for those Truths which no Body can deny, will do no good to those who deny them. The Clergy, who are so impudent to teach the People the Doctrines of Faith, are all either cunning Knaves or mad Fools; for none but artificial designing Men, P. 4.
and crackt-brained Enthusiasts, presume to be Guides to others in matters of Speculation, which all the Doctrines of Christianity are; and whoever has a mind to learn the Christian Religion, naturally chuses such Knaves and Fools to teach them. Now the *Bible*, which contains P. 10.
the Precepts of the Priests Religion, is the most difficult Book in the World to be understood;

It

P. 11, 12. It requires a thorow Knowledge in Natural, Civil, Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, Law, Husbandry, Sailing, Phyſick, Pharmacy, Mathematicks, Metaphyſicks, Ethicks, and every thing elſe that can be named: And every Body who believes it, ought to underſtand it, and muſt do ſo by force of his own *Free Thinking*, without any Guide or Inſtructor.

P. 15. How can a Man *think* at all, if he does not think freely? A Man who does not eat and drink freely, does not eat and drink at all. Why may not I be deny'd the liberty of *Free-ſeeing*, as well as *Free-thinking*? Yet no body pretends that the firſt is unlawful, for a Cat may look on a King; though you be near-ſighted, or have weak or ſoar Eyes, or are blind, you may be a *Free-ſeer*; you ought to ſee for your ſelf, and not truſt to a Guide to chuſe the Colour of your Stockings, or ſave you from falling into a Ditch.

In like manner there ought to be no reſtraint at all on *thinking freely* upon any Propoſition, however impious or abſurd. There is not the leaſt hurt in the wickedeſt Thoughts, provided they be free; nor in telling thoſe Thoughts to every Body, and endeavouring to convince the World of them; for all this is included in the Doctrine of *Free-thinking*, as I ſhall plainly ſhew you in what follows; and therefore you are all along to underſtand the Word *Free-thinking* in this Senſe.

P. 27. If you are apt to be afraid of the Devil, *think freely* of him, and you deſtroy him and his Kingdom. *Free-thinking* has done him more Miſchief than all the Clergy in the World ever could do; they *believe in the Devil*, they have an *Intereſt* in him, and therefore are the great Supports of his Kingdom. The Devil

was

was in the *Saxon General* before they began to P. 28.
be *Free-thinkers*. For *England* and *Holland* were
formerly the *Christian* Territories of the Devil;
I told you how he left *Holland*; and *Free-thinking* P. 30.
and the *Revolution* banish'd him from *England*;
I defy all the Clergy to shew me when they P. 42.
ever had such Success against him. My Mean-
ing is, that to think freely of the Devil, is to
think there is no Devil at all; and he that
thinks so, the Devil's in him if he be afraid
of the Devil.

But within these two or three Years the De-
vil has come into *England* again, and Dr. *Sa-*
cheverell has given him Commission to appear
in the shape of a *Cat*, and carry old Women P. 43.
about upon Broomsticks: And the Devil has
now so many *Ministers ordained to his Service*,
that they have rendred *Free-thinking* odious,
and nothing but the Second Coming of *Christ*
can restore it.

The Priests tell me I am to believe the *Bible*, P. 39.
but *Free-thinking* tells me otherwise in many
Particulars: The *Bible* says, the *Jews* were a
Nation favoured by God; but I who am a *Free-*
thinker say, that cannot be, because the *Jews*
lived in a *Corner* of the Earth, and *Free-thinking*
makes it clear, that those who live in *Corners*
cannot be Favourites of God: The *New Te-*
stament all along asserts the Truth of Chri-
stianity, but *Free-thinking* denies it; because P. 42.
Christianity was communicated but to a few;
and whatever is communicated but to a few,
cannot be true; for that is like *Whispering*, and
the Proverb says, that there is no Whisperings
without Lying.

Here is a Society in *London* for propagating P. 41.
Free-thinking throughout the World, encouraged
and supported by the Queen and many others.

You

You say perhaps, it is for propagating the Gospel. Do you think the Millionaries we send, will tell the Heathens that they must not *think freely*? No surely; why then, 'tis manifest those Missionaries must be *Free-thinkers*, and make the Heathens so too. But why should not the King of *Siam*, whose Religion is Heathenism and Idolatry, send over a parcel of his Priests to convert us to *his Church*, as well as we send Missionaries there? Both Projects are exactly of a Piece, and equally reasonable; and if those Heathen Priests were here, it would be our Duty to hearken to them, and *think freely* whether *they* may not be in the right rather than we. I heartily wish a Detachment of such Divines as Dr. *Atterbury*, Dr. *Sacheverell*, Dr. *Smith*, Dr. *Snatch*, and some others, were sent every Year to the furthest part of the Heathen World, and that we had a Cargo of their Priests in return, who would spread *Free-thinking* among us; then the War would go on, the late Ministry be restored, and Faction cease, which our Priests inflame by haranguing upon Texts, and falsly call that preaching the Gospel.

P. 42.

P. 43.

P. 45.

I have another Project in my Head which ought to be put in execution, in order to make us *Free-thinkers*: It is a great Hardship and Injustice, that our Priests must not be disturbed while they are prating in their Pulpit. For Example: Why should not *William Penn* the Quaker, or any *Anabaptist*, *Papist*, *Muggletonian*, *Jew* or *Sweet Singer*, have liberty to come into St. *Paul's* Church, in the midst of Divine Service, and endeavour to convert first the Aldermen, then the Preacher, and Singing-Men? Or pray, why might not poor Mr. *Whiston*, who denies the Divinity of Christ, be allow'd to come into the Lower House of Convocation, and convert

the

the Clergy? But alas we are over-run with such false Notions, that if *Penn* or *Whiston* should do their Duty, they would be reckoned Fanaticks, and Disturbers of the Holy Synod, although they have as good a Title to it, as St. *Paul* had to go into the Synagogues of the *Jews*; and their Authority is full as Divine as his.

Christ himself commands us to be *Free-thinkers*, for he bids us search the Scriptures, and take heed what and whom we hear; by which he plainly warns us, not to believe our Bishops and Clergy; for *Jesus Christ*, when he consider'd that all the *Jewish* and *Heathen* Priests, whose Religion he came to abolish, were his Enemies, rightly concluded that those appointed by him to preach his own Gospel, would probably be so too; and could not be secure, that any Sett of Priests, of the Faith he deliver'd, would ever be otherwise; therefore it is fully demonstrated that the Clergy of the Church of *England* are mortal Enemies to Christ, and ought not to be believ'd. P. 46.

But without the Privilege of *Free-thinking*, how is it possible to know which is the right *Scripture*? There are perhaps twenty Sorts of *Scriptures* in the several Parts of the World, and every Sett of Priests contends that their *Scripture* is the true One. The *Indian Brahmines* have a Book of Scripture call'd the *Shaster*; the *Persees* their *Zundavastha*; the *Bonzes* in *China* have theirs, written by the Disciples of *Fo-he*, whom they call *God and Saviour of the World, who was born to teach the way of Salvation, and to give satisfaction for all Men's Sins*. Which you see is directly the same with what our *Priests* pretend of *Christ*; And must we not *think freely* to find out which are in the right, whether the P. 52.

Biſhops or the *Bonzes?* But the *Talapoins* or *Heathen* Clergy of *Siam* approach yet nearer to the Syſtem of our Prieſts; they have a Book of *Scripture* written by *Sommonocodum*, who, the *Siameſe* ſay, was *born of a Virgin*, and was *the God expected by the Univerſe*; juſt as our *Prieſts* tell us, that *Jeſus Chriſt* was born of the *Virgin Mary*, and was the *Meſſiah* ſo long expected. The *Turkiſh* Prieſts or *Derviſes* have their Scripture, which they call the *Alcoran*. The *Jews* have the *Old Teſtament* for their Scripture, and the *Chriſtians* have both the Old and the New. Now among all theſe Scriptures there cannot above one be right; and how is it poſſible to know which is that, without reading them all, and then *thinking freely*, every one of us for our ſelves, without following the Advice or Inſtruction of any Guide, before we venture to chuſe? The Parliament ought to be at the Charge of finding a ſufficient number of theſe *Scriptures* for every one of Her Majeſty's Subjects, for there are Twenty to One againſt us, that we may be in the wrong: But a great deal of *Free-thinking* will at laſt ſet us all right, and every one will adhere to the *Scripture* he likes beſt; by which means Religion, Peace, and Wealth, will be for ever ſecured in Her Majeſty's Realms.

P. 54. And it is the more neceſſary that the good People of *England* ſhould have liberty to chuſe ſome other *Scripture*, becauſe all *Chriſtian* Prieſts differ ſo much about the Copies of theirs, and about the various Readings of the ſeveral Manuſcripts, which quite deſtroys the Authority of the Bible: For what Authority can a Book pretend to, where there are various Readings? And for this reaſon, it is manifeſt that no Man can know the Opinions of *Ariſtotle*

or *Plato*, or believe the Facts related by *Thucidydes* or *Livy*, or be pleased with the Poetry of *Homer* and *Virgil*, all which Books are utterly useless, upon account of their various Readings. Some Books of *Scripture* are said to be lost, and this utterly destroys the Credit of those that are left: Some we reject, which the *Africans* and *Copticks* receive; and why may we not *think freely*, and reject the rest? Some think the Scriptures wholly inspired, some partly; and some not all. Now this is just the very Case of the *Bramines*, *Persees*, *Bonzes*, *Talapoins*, *Dervizes*, *Rabbi*'s, and all *other Priests* who build their Religion upon Books, as our Priests do upon their Bibles; they all equally differ about the Copies, various Readings and Inspirations, of their several Scriptures, and God knows which are in the right; *Free-thinking* alone can determine it.

It would be endless to shew in how many Particulars the Priests of the *Heathen* and *Christian Churches* differ about the Meaning even of those Scriptures which they universally receive as Sacred. But to avoid Prolixity, I shall confine my self to the different Opinions among the Priests of the Church of *England*, and here only give you a Specimen, because even these are too many to be enumerated. P. 56.

I have found out a Bishop (though indeed his Opinions are condemn'd by all his Brethren) who allows the Scriptures to be so difficult, that God has left them rather as a Trial of our Industry than a Repository of our Faith, and Furniture of *Creeds* and Articles of *Belief*; with several other admirable Schemes of *Free-thinking*, which you may consult at your leisure. P. 57.

The Doctrine of the *Trinity* is the most fundamental Point of the whole *Christian* Religion. P. 61.

Nothing is more easie to a *Free-thinker*; yet what different Notions of it do the *English* Priests pretend to deduce from Scripture, explaining it by *specifick Unities*, *eternal Modes of Subsistance*, and the like unintelligible Jargon? Nay, 'tis a Question whether this Doctrine be Fundamental or no; for though Dr. *South* and Bishop *Bull* affirm it, yet Bishop *Taylor* and Dr. *Wallis* deny it. And that excellent *Free-thinking* Prelate, Bishop *Taylor*, observes, that *Athanasius*'s Example was followed with too much greediness; by which means it has happened, that the greater number of our Priests are in that Sentiment, and think it necessary to believe the *Trinity*, and Incarnation of *Christ*.

P. 65. Our Priests likewise dispute several Circumstances about the Resurrection of the Dead, the Nature of our Bodies after the Resurrection, and in what manner they shall be united to our Souls. They also attack one another *very weakly with great Vigour*, about Predestination. And it is certainly true, (for Bishop *Taylor* and Mr. *Whiston* the Socinian say so) that all Churches in Prosperity alter their Doctrines every Age, and are neither satisfy'd with themselves, nor their own Confessions; neither does any Clergymen of Sense believe the Thirty nine Articles.

P. 68. Our Priests differ about the Eternity of Hell-Torments. The famous Dr. *Henry More*, and the most pious and rational of all Priests Doctor *Tillotson*, (both *Free-thinkers*) believe them to be not Eternal. They differ about keeping the Sabbath, the Divine Right of Episcopacy, and the Doctrine of Original Sin; which is the Foundation of the whole Christian Religion; for if Men are not liable to be damned for *Adam*'s Sin, the Christian Religion is an Imposture: Yet this is now disputed among them.

so is Lay-Baptism; so was formerly the lawfulness of Usury, but now the Priests are common Stock-jobbers, Attorneys and Scriveners. In short there is no end of disputing among Priests, and therefore I conclude, that there ought to be no such Thing in the World as Priests, Teachers, or Guides, for instructing ignorant People in Religion; but that every Man ought to *think freely* for himself.

I will tell you my meaning in all this; the Priests dispute every Point in the Christian Religion, as well as almost every Text in the Bible; and the force of my Argument lies here, that whatever Point is disputed by one or two Divines, however condemned by the Church, not only that particular Point, but the whole Article to which it relates, may lawfully be received or rejected by any *Free Thinker*. For Instance, suppose *More* and *Tillotson* deny the Eternity of Hell Torments, a *Free Thinker* may deny all future Punishments whatsoever. The Priests dispute about explaining the *Trinity*; therefore a *Free Thinker* may reject one or two, or the whole three *Persons*; at least he may reject Christianity, because the *Trinity* is the most fundamental Doctrine of that Religion. So I affirm Original Sin, and that Men are now liable to be damned for *Adam*'s Sin, to be the Foundation of the whole Christian Religion; but this Point was formerly, and is now disputed, therefore a *Free Thinker* may deny the whole. And I cannot help giving you one further Direction, how I insinuate all along, that the wisest *Free Thinking* Priests, whom you may distinguish by the Epithets I bestow them, were those who differed most from the generality of their Brethren.

But besides, the Conduct of our Priests, in many other Points, makes *Free Thinking* unavoidable; P. 76.

voidable; for ſome of them own, that the Doctrines of the Church are contradictory to one another, as well as to Reaſon: Which I thus prove; Dr. *Sacheverell* ſays in his Speech at his Tryal, that by abandoning Paſſive Obedience we muſt render our ſelves the moſt inconſiſtent Church in the World; Now 'tis plain, that one Inconſiſtency could not make the moſt inconſiſtent Church in the World; *ergo*, there muſt have been a great many Inconſiſtencies and contradictory Doctrines in the Church before. Dr.
P. 77. *South* deſcribes the Incarnation of Chriſt, as an aſtoniſhing Myſtery, impoſſible to be conceived by Mans Reaſon; *ergo*, it is contradictory to it ſelf, and to Reaſon, and ought to be exploded by all *Free Thinkers*.

P. 79. Another Inſtance of the Prieſts Conduct, which multiplies *Free Thinkers*, is their acknowledgments of Abuſes, Defects, and falſe Doctrines in the Church; particularly that of eating *Black Pudding*, which is ſo plainly forbid in the *Old* and *New Teſtament*, that I wonder thoſe who pretend to believe a Syllable in either, will preſume to taſte it. Why ſhould I mention the
P. 80. want of Diſcipline, and of a Side-board at the Altar, with Complaints of other great Abuſes Defects made by ſome of the Prieſts, which no Man can *think* on without *Free Thinking*, and conſequently rejecting Chriſtianity.

P. 82. When I ſee an honeſt Free Thinking Biſhop endeavour to deſtroy the Power and Privileges of the Church, and Dr. *Atterbury* angry with him for it, and calling it *dirty Work*, what can I conclude, by vertue of being a *Free Thinker*, but that Chriſtianity is all a Cheat?

P. 83. Mr. *Whiſton* has publiſh'd ſeveral Tracts, wherein he abſolutely denies the Divinity of *Chriſt*: A Biſhop tells him, *Sir, in any Matter*

where

where you have the Church's Judgment against you, you should be careful not to break the Peace of the Church, by Writing against it, though you are sure you are in the right. Now my Opinion is directly contrary; and I affirm, that if Ten thousand Free Thinkers thought differently from the received Doctrine, and from each other, they would be all in Duty bound to publish their Thoughts (provided they were all sure of being in the right) though it broke the Peace of the Church and State, Ten thousand times. P. 86. P. 91.

And here I must take leave to tell you, although you cannot but have perceived it from what I have already said, and shall be still more amply convinced by what is to follow; That *Free Thinking* signifies nothing, without *Free Speaking* and *Free Writing*. It is the indispensible Duty of a *Free Thinker*, to endeavour *forcing* all the World to think as he does, and by that means make them *Free Thinkers* too. You are also to understand, that I allow no Man to be a *Free Thinker*, any further than as he differs from the received Doctrines of Religion. Where a Man falls in, though by perfect Chance, with what is generally believed, he is in that Point a confined and limited Thinker; and you shall see by and by, that I celebrate those for the noblest *Free Thinkers* in every Age, who differed from the Religion of their Countries in the most fundamental Points, and especially in those which bear any Analogy to the chief Fundamentals of Religion among us.

Another Trick of the Priests, is to charge all Men with Atheism, who have more Wit than themselves; which therefore I expect will be my Case for Writing this Discourse: This is what makes them so implacable against Mr. *Gildon*, Dr. *Tindal*, Mr. *Toland*, and my self, and when P. 85. P. 92.

they

they call us *Free* Atheists, it provokes us to be *Free Thinkers*.

P. 86. Again; The Priests cannot agree when their Scripture was wrote. They differ about the number of Canonical Books, and the various Readings. Now those few among us who understand Latin, are careful to tell this to our Disciples, who presently fall a *Free Thinking*, that the Bible is a Book not to be depended upon in any thing at all.

P. 91. There is another Thing that mightily spreads *Free Thinking*, which I believe you would hardly guess: The Priests have got a way of late of Writing Books against *Free Thinking*, I mean Treatises in Dialogue, where they introduce *Atheists*, *Deists*, *Sceptics* and *Socinians* offering their several Arguments. Now these *Free Thinkers* are too hard for the Priests themselves in their own Books; and how can it be otherwise? For if the Arguments usually offered by *Atheists*, are fairly represented in these Books, they must needs convert every Body that reads them; because *Atheists*, *Deists*, *Sceptics* and *Socinians*, have certainly better Arguments to maintain their Opinions, than any the Priests can produce to maintain the contrary.

Mr. *Creech*, a Priest, translated *Lucretius* into *English*, which is a compleat System of Atheism; and several Young Students, who were afterwards Priests, writ Verses in Praise of this Translation. The Arguments against Providence in that Book are so strong, that they have added mightily to the Number of *Free Thinkers*.

P. 92. What should I mention the pious Cheats of the Priests, who in the *New Testament* translate the Word *Ecclesia* sometimes the *Church*, and sometimes the *Congregation*; and *Episcopus*, sometimes

times a *Biſhop*, and ſometimes an *Overſeer*? A Prieſt tranſlating a Book, left out a whole Paſſage that reflected on the *King*, by which he was an Enemy to *Political Free Thinking*, a moſt conſiderable Branch of our Syſtem. Another Prieſt tranſlating a Book of Travels, left out a lying Miracle, out of meer Malice to conceal an Argument for *Free Thinking*. In ſhort, theſe Frauds are very common in all Books which are publiſhed by *Prieſts*: But however, I love to excuſe them whenever I can: And as to this Accuſation, they may plead the Authority of the Ancient Fathers of the Church for Forgery, Corruption, and mangling of Authors, with more Reaſon than for any of their Articles of Faith. St. *Jerom*, St. *Hilary*, *Euſebius Vercellenſis*, *Victorinus*, and ſeveral others, were all guilty of arrant Forgery and Corruption: For when they tranſlated the Works of ſeveral *Free-thinkers*, whom they called *Hereticks*, they omitted all their Hereſies or *Free-thinkings*, and had the Impudence to own it to the World. P. 95. P. 96.

From theſe many notorious Inſtances of the Prieſt's Conduct, I conclude they are not to be relied on in any one thing relating to Religion, but that every Man muſt think freely for himſelf. P. 99.

But to this it may be objected, that the Bulk of Mankind is as well qualified for *flying* as *thinking*, and if every Man thought it his Duty to *think freely*, and trouble his Neighbour with his Thoughts (which is an eſſential Part of *Free-thinking*,) it would make wild work in the World. I anſwer; whoever cannot *think freely*, may let it alone if he pleaſes, by virtue of his Right to *think freely*; that is to ſay, if ſuch a Man *freely thinks* that he cannot *think freely*, of which every Man is a ſufficient Judge, why then he need not *think freely*, unleſs he *thinks* fit.

Beſides, if the Bulk of Mankind cannot *think freely* in Matters of Speculation, as the Being of a God, the Immortality of the Soul, *&c.* why then, *Free-thinking* is indeed no Duty: But then the *Prieſts* muſt allow, that Men are not concerned to believe whether there is a God or no. But ſtill thoſe who are diſpoſed to *think freely*, may *think freely* if they pleaſe.

P. 101. It is again objected, that *Free-thinking* will produce endleſs Diviſions in Opinion, and by conſequence diſorder Society. To which I anſwer;

When every ſingle Man comes to have a different Opinion every Day from the whole World, and from himſelf, by Virtue of *Free-thinking*, and thinks it his Duty to convert every Man to his own *Free-thinking* (as all we *Free-thinkers* do) how can that poſſibly create ſo great a Diverſity of Opinions, as to have a Sett of Prieſts agree among themſelves to teach the ſame Opinions in their ſeveral Pariſhes to all who will come to hear them? Beſides, if all People were of the ſame Opinion, the Remedy would be worſe than the Diſeaſe; I will tell you the Reaſon ſome other time.

Beſides, difference in Opinion, eſpecially in Matters of great Moment, breeds no Confuſion at all. Witneſs *Papiſt* and *Proteſtant*, *Roundhead* and *Cavalier*, and *Whig* and *Tory* now among us. I obſerve, the *Turkiſh* Empire is more at Peace *within it ſelf* than *Chriſtian* Princes are *with one another*. Thoſe noble *Turkiſh* Virtues of Charity and Toleration, are what contribute chiefly to the flouriſhing State of that happy Monarchy. There *Chriſtians* and *Jews* are tolerated, and live at eaſe, if they can hold their Tongues and *think freely*, provided they never ſet foot within the *Moſchs*, nor write againſt *Mahomet*: A few Plunderings now and then by their *Janiſaries* are all they have to fear.

It

It is objected, that by *Free-thinking*, Men will *think* themſelves into *Atheiſm*; and indeed I have allowed all along, that Atheiſtical Books convert Men to *Free-thinking*. But ſuppoſe that be true; I can bring you two Divines who affirm Superſtition and Enthuſiaſm to be worſe than Atheiſm, and more miſchievous to Society, and in ſhort it is neceſſary that the Bulk of the People ſhould be Atheiſts or Superſtitious.

It is objected, that Prieſts ought to be relied on by the People, as Lawyers and Phyſicians, becauſe it is their Faculty. P. 107.

I anſwer, 'Tis true, a Man who is no Lawyer is not ſuffered to plead for himſelf; But every Man may be his own Quack if he pleaſes, and he only ventures his Life; but in the other Caſe the Prieſt tells him he muſt be damned; therefore do not truſt the Prieſt, but *think freely* for your ſelf, and if you happen to think there is no Hell, there certainly is none, and conſequently you cannot be damned; I anſwer further, that wherever there is no *Lawyer*, *Phyſician*, or *Prieſt*, that Country is *Paradiſe*. Beſides, all Prieſts (except the Orthodox, and thoſe are not ours, nor any that I know) are hired by the Publick to lead Men into Miſchief; but *Lawyers* and *Phyſicians* are not, you hire them your ſelf.

It is objected (by Prieſts no doubt, but I have forgot their Names) that falſe Speculations are neceſſary to be impoſed upon Men, in order to aſſiſt the Magiſtrate in keeping the Peace, and that Men ought therefore to be deceived like Children, for their own Good. I anſwer, that Zeal for impoſing Speculations, whether true or falſe (under which Name of Speculations I include all Opinions of Religion, as the Belief of a God, Providence, Immortality of the Soul, future Rewards and Puniſhments, *&c.*) has done P. 111.

more hurt than it is possible for Religion to do good. It puts us to the Charge of maintaining Ten thousand Priests in *England*, which is a Burthen upon Society never felt on any other occasion; and a greater Evil to the Publick than if these Ecclesiasticks were only employed in the most innocent Offices of Life, which I take to be
P. 114. *Eating* and *Drinking*. Now if you offer to impose any thing on Mankind besides what relates to moral Duties, as to pay your Debts, not pick Pockets, nor commit Murder, and the like; that is to say, if besides this, you oblige them to be-
P. 115. lieve in God and Jesus Christ, what you add to their Faith will take just so much off from their Morality. By this Argument it is manifest that a perfect moral Man must be a perfect Atheist, every Inch of Religion he gets, loses him an Inch of Morality: For there is a certain *Quantum* belongs to every Man, of which there is nothing to spare. This is clear from the common Practice of all our Priests, they never once Preach to you to love your Neighbour, to be just in your Dealings, or to be Sober and Temperate:
P. 116. The Streets of *London* are full of Common Whores, publickly tolerated in their Wickedness; yet the Priests make no Complaints against this Enormity, either from the Pulpit or the Press: I can affirm, that neither you nor I Sir, have ever heard one Sermon against Whoring since we were Boys. No, the Priests allow all these Vices, and love us the better for them, provided we will promise not to *harangue upon a Text*, nor to sprinkle a little Water in a Child's Face, which they call Baptizing, and would engross it all to themselves.
P. 117. Besides, the *Priests* engage all the Rogues, Villains and Fools in their Party, in order to make it as large as they can: By this means they se-

duced

duced *Constantine the Great* over to their Religion, who was the first Christian Emperor, and so horrible a Villain, that the *Heathen* Priests told him they could not expiate his Crimes in their Church; so he was at a loss to know what to do, till an *Egyptian* Bishop assured him that there was no Villany so great, but was to be expiated by the Sacraments of the Christian Religion; upon which he became a Christian, and to him that Religion owes its first Settlement.

It is objected, that *Free-thinkers* themselves P. 118.
are the most infamous, wicked and senseless of all Mankind.

I answer, First, We say the same of *Priests* and other Believers. But the Truth is, Men of all Sects are equally good and bad; for no Religion whatsoever contributes in the least to mend Mens Lives.

I answer, Secondly, That *Free-thinkers* use their Understanding, but those who have Religion, do not, therefore the first have more Understanding than the others; Witness *Toland*, *Tindal*, *Gildon*, *Clendon*, *Coward*, and my self. For, use Legs and have Legs.

I answer, Thirdly, That *Free-thinkers* are the P. 120.
most virtuous Persons in the World; for every *Free-thinker* must certainly differ from the *Priests*, and from Nine hundred ninety nine of a Thousand of those among whom they live; and are therefore Virtuous of course, because every Body hates them.

I answer, Fourthly, That the most virtuous P. 122.
People in all Ages have been *Free-thinkers*; of which I shall produce several Instances.

Socrates was a *Free-thinker*; for he disbelieved the Gods of his Country, and the common *Creeds* about them, and declared his Dislike when he heard Men attribute *Repentance*, *Anger*, and P. 123.

other

other Passions to the Gods, and talk of Wars and Battles in Heaven, and of the Gods getting Women with Child, and such like fabulous and blasphemous Stories. I pick out these Particulars, because they are the very same with what the Priests have in their Bibles, where *Repentance* and *Anger* are attributed to God, where it is said, there was *War in Heaven*; and that the *Virgin* Mary *was with Child by the Holy Ghost*, whom the Priests call God; all fabulous and blasphemous Stories. Now, I affirm *Socrates* to have been a true *Christian*. You will ask perhaps how that can be, since he lived Three or four hundred Years before Christ? I answer with *Justin Martyr*, that *Christ* is nothing else but *Reason*, and I hope you do not think *Socrates* lived before *Reason*. Now, this true Christian *Socrates* never made Notions, Speculations, or Mysteries any Part of his Religion, but demonstrated all Men to be Fools who troubled themselves with Enquiries into heavenly Things. Lastly, 'tis plain that *Socrates* was a *Free-thinker*, because he was calumniated for an *Atheist*, as *Free-thinkers* generally are, only because he was an Enemy to all Speculations and Enquiries into heavenly Things. For I argue thus, that if I never trouble myself to think whether there be a God or no, and forbid others to do it, I am a *Free-thinker*, but not an *Atheist*.

P. 124.

P. 126. *Plato* was a *Free-thinker*, and his Notions are so like some in the Gospel, that a Heathen charged Christ with borrowing his Doctrine from *Plato*. But *Origen* defends Christ very well against this Charge, by saying he did not understand *Greek*, and therefore could not borrow his Doctrines from *Plato*. However their two Religions agreed so well, that it was common for Christians to turn *Platonists*, and *Platonists*

tonists Christians. When the Christians found out this, one of their zealous Priests (worse than any Atheist) forged several Things under *Plato*'s Name, but conformable to Christianity, by which the Heathens were fraudulently converted.

Epicurus was the greatest of all *Free-thinkers*, and consequently the most virtuous Man in the World. His Opinions in Religion were the most compleat System of Atheism that ever appeared. Christians ought to have the greatest Veneration for him, because he taught a higher Point of Virtue than Christ; I mean the Virtue of *Friendship*, which in the Sense we usually understand it, is not so much as named in the New Testament. P. 129.

Plutarch was a *Free-thinker*, notwithstanding his being a *Priest*; but indeed he was a *Heathen Priest*. His *Free-thinking* appears by shewing the Innocence of Atheism (which at worst is only false Reasoning) and the Mischiefs of Superstition; and explains what Superstition is, by calling it a Conceit of immortal Ills after Death, the Opinion of Hell Torments, dreadful Aspects, doleful Groans, and the like. He is likewise very Satyrical upon the publick Forms of Devotion in his own Country (a *Qualification* absolutely necessary to a *Free-thinker*) yet those Forms which he ridicules, are the very same that now pass for *true Worship* in almost all Countries: I am sure some of them do so in ours; such as abject Looks, Distortions, wry Faces, beggarly Tones, Humiliation, and Contrition. P. 131.

Varro the most Learned among the *Romans* was a *Free-thinker*; for he said, the Heathen Divinity contained many Fables below the Dignity of Immortal Beings; such for Instance P. 134.

as

as Gods BIDDEN and PROCEEDING from other Gods. These two Words I desire you will particularly remark, because they are the very Terms made use of by our Priests in their Doctrine of the *Trinity*: He says likewise, that there are many Things false in Religion, and so say all *Free-thinkers*; but then he adds; *Which the Vulgar ought not to know, but it is Expedient they should believe.* In this last he indeed discovers the whole Secret of a Statesman and Politician, by denying the Vulgar the Priviledge of *Free-thinking*, and here I differ from him. However it is manifest from hence, that the *Trinity* was an Invention of Statesmen and Politicians.

P. 135. The Grave and Wise *Cato* the Censor will for ever live in that noble *Free-thinking* Saying; I wonder, said he, how one of your Priests can forbear laughing when he sees another. (For Contempt of Priests is another grand Characteristick of a Free-thinker). This shews that *Cato* understood the whole Mystery of the *Roman* Religion, *as by Law Established*. I beg you Sir, not to overlook these last Words, *Religion as by Law Established*. I translate *Haruspex* into the general Word, *Priest*. Thus I apply the Sentence to our *Priests* in *England*, and when Dr. *Smalridge* sees Dr. *Atterbury*, I wonder how either of them can forbear laughing at the Cheat they put upon the People, by making them believe their *Religion as by Law Established*.

Cicero, that consummate Philosopher, and noble Patriot, though he were a *Priest*, and consequently more likely to be a *Knave*, gave the greatest Proofs of his *Free-thinking*. First, He professed the *Sceptick* Philosophy, which doubts of every thing. Then, he wrote two

Treatises;

Treatiſes; in the firſt, he ſhews the Weakneſs of the *Stoicks* Arguments for the Being of the Gods: In the latter, he has deſtroyed the whole *reveal'd* Religion of the *Greeks* and *Romans* (for why ſhould not theirs be a *reveal'd* Religion as well as that of Chriſt?) *Cicero* likewiſe tells us, as his own Opinion, that they who ſtudy Philoſophy, do not believe there are any Gods: He denies the Immortality of the Soul, and ſays, there can be nothing after Death.

And becauſe the Prieſts have the Impu- P. 137.
dence to quote *Cicero* in their Pulpits and Pamphlets, againſt *Free-thinking*; I am reſolved to diſarm them of his Authority. You muſt know, his Philoſophical Works are generally in Dialogues, where People are brought in diſputing againſt one another: Now the Prieſts when they ſee an Argument to prove a God, offered perhaps by a *Stoick*, are ſuch Knaves or Blockheads, to quote it as if it were *Cicero*'s own; whereas *Cicero* was ſo noble a *Free-thinker*, that he believed nothing at all of the Matter, nor ever ſhews the leaſt Inclination to favour Superſtition, or the Belief of God, and the Immortality of the Soul; unleſs what he throws out ſometimes to ſave himſelf from Danger, in his Speeches to the *Roman* Mob; whoſe Religion was, however, much more Innocent and leſs Abſurd, than that of *Popery* at leaſt: And I could ſay more,—but you underſtand me.

Seneca was a great *Free-thinker*, and had a P. 147.
noble Notion of the Worſhip of the Gods, for which our Prieſts would call any Man an Atheiſt: He laughs at Morning-Devotions, or Worſhipping upon Sabbath-Days; he ſays God has no need of *Miniſters*, and *Servants*,

 becauſe

because he himself *serves* Mankind. This religious Man, like his religious Brethren the *Stoicks*, denies the Immortality of the Soul, and says, all that is feign'd to be so terrible in Hell, is but a Fable: Death puts an end to all our Misery, *&c.* Yet the Priests were anciently so fond of *Seneca*, that they forged a Correspondence of Letters between him and St. *Paul*.

P. 150. *Solomon* himself, whose Writings are called the Word of God, was such a *Free Thinker*, that if he were now alive, nothing but his Building of Churches could have kept our Priests from calling him an Atheist. He affirms the Eternity of the World almost in the same manner with *Manilius* the *Heathen* Philosophical Poet (which Opinion entirely overthrows the History of the Creation by *Moses*, and all the *New Testament*): He denies the Immortality of the Soul, assures us that Men die like Beasts, and that both go to one Place.

P. 153. The Prophets of the *Old Testament* were generally *Free Thinkers*: You must understand, that their way of learning to Prophesie was by *Musick* and *Drinking*. These Prophets writ against the *Established Religion* of the *Jews*, (which those People looked upon as the Institution of God himself) as if they believed it was all a Cheat: That is to say, with as great liberty against the Priests and Prophets of *Israel*, as Dr. *Tindall* did lately against the Priests and Prophets of our *Israel*, who has clearly shewn them and their Religion to be Cheats. To prove this, you may read several Passages in *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel*, *Amos*, *Jeremiah*, *&c.* wherein you will find such Instances of *Free Thinking*,

P. 157. that if any *Englishman* had talked so in our Days,

Days, their Opinions would have been Regiſtred in Dr. *Sacheverell*'s Tryal, and in the Repreſentation of the Lower Houſe of Convocation, and produced as ſo many Proofs of the Prophaneneſs, Blaſphemy, and Atheiſm of the Nation; there being nothing more Prophane, Blaſphemous, or Atheiſtical in thoſe Repreſentations, than what theſe Prophets have ſpoke, whoſe Writings are yet called by our Prieſts the *Word of God*. And therefore theſe Prophets are as much *Atheiſts* as my ſelf, or as any of my Free-thinking Brethren, whom I lately named to you.

Joſephus was a great *Free-thinker*: I wiſh he had choſen a better Subject to write on, than thoſe ignorant, barbarous, ridiculous Scoundrels the *Jews*, whom God (if we may believe the Prieſts) thought fit to chuſe for his own People. I will give you ſome Inſtances of his *Free-thinking*. He ſays, *Cain* travelled through ſeveral Countries, and kept Company with Rakes and profligate Fellows, he corrupted the Simplicities of former Times, *&c.* which plainly ſuppoſes Men before *Adam*, and conſequently that the Prieſt's Hiſtory of the Creation by *Moſes*, is an Impoſture. He ſays, the *Iſraelites* paſſing through the Red Sea, was no more than *Alexander*'s paſſing at the *Pamphilion* Sea; that as for the appearance of God at Mount *Sinai*, the Reader may believe it as he pleaſes; that *Moſes* perſuaded the *Jews*, he had God for his Guide, juſt as the *Greeks* pretended they had their Laws from *Apollo*. Theſe are noble Strains of *Free Thinking*, which the Prieſts know not how to ſolve, but by *thinking* as *freely*; for one of them ſays, that *Joſephus* writ this to make his Work acceptable to

P. 157.

P. 158.

P. 161.

the *Heathens*, by ſtriking out every thing that was incredible.

P. 162. *Origen*, who was the firſt Chriſtian that had any Learning, has left a noble Teſtimony of his *Free Thinking*; for a general Council has determined him to be damn'd; which plainly ſhews he was a *Free Thinker*: And was no *Saint*; for People were only Sainted becauſe of their want of Learning and exceſs of Zeal; ſo that all the Fathers, who are called *Saints* by the Prieſts, were worſe than Atheiſts.

P. 164. *Minutius Fœlix* ſeems to be a true, Modern, Latitudinarian, *Free Thinking* Chriſtian, for he is againſt Altars, Churches, publick Preaching, and publick Aſſemblies; and likewiſe againſt Prieſts; for he ſays, there were ſeveral great flouriſhing Empires before there were any Orders of Prieſts in the World.

P. 165. *Syneſius*, who had too much Learning and too little Zeal for a *Saint*, was for ſome time a great *Free Thinker*; he could not believe the Reſurrection till he was made a Biſhop, and then pretended to be convinced by a Lying Miracle.

To come to our own Country: My Lord *Bacon* was a great *Free Thinker*, when he tells us, that whatever has the leaſt Relation to Religion, is particularly liable to Suſpicion, by which he ſeems to ſuſpect all the Facts whereon moſt of the Superſtitions (that is to ſay, what the Prieſts call the Religions) of the World are grounded. He alſo prefers Atheiſm before Superſtition.

Mr. *Hobbs* was a Perſon of great Learning, Virtue and *Free Thinking*, except in his *High-Church* Politicks.

But

But *Arch Bishop Tillotson* is the Person whom all *English Free Thinkers* own as their Head; and his Virtue is indisputable for this manifest Reason; that Dr. *Hicks*, a Priest, calls him an Atheist; says, he caused several to turn Atheists, and to ridicule the Priesthood and Religion. These must be allowed to be noble effects of *Free Thinking*. This great Prelate assures us, that all the Duties of Christian Religion, with respect to God, are no other but what natural Light prompt Men to, except the two Sacraments, and praying to God in the Name and Mediation of Christ; As a Priest and Prelate he was obliged to say something of Christianity; but pray observe, Sir, how he brings himself off. He justly affirms that even these things are of less Moment than natural Duties; and because Mothers nursing their Children is a natural Duty, it is of more Moment than the two Sacraments, or than praying to God in the Name and by the Mediation of Christ. This *Free Thinking* Archbishop could not allow a Miracle sufficient to give Credit to a Prophet who taught any thing contrary to our natural Notions: By which it is plain, he rejected at once all the Mysteries of Christianity. P. 172. P. 174.

I could name one and twenty more great Men, who were all *Free Thinkers*; but that I fear to be tedious. For, 'tis certain that all Men of Sense depart from the Opinions commonly received; and are consequently more or less Men of Sense, according as they depart more or less from the Opinions commonly received; neither can you name an Enemy to *Free Thinking*, however he be dignify'd or distinguish'd, whether *Archbishop*, *Bishop*, *Priest* or *Deacon*, who has not been either a *crack-brain'd Enthusiast*, a *diabolical Villain*, or a most *profound ignorant Brute*. P. 177. P. 178.

Thus

Thus, Sir, I have endeavour'd to execute your Commands, and you may print this Letter if you please; but I would have you conceal your Name, For my Opinion of Virtue is, that that we ought not to venture doing our selves harm, by endeavouring to do good. I am

Yours, &c.

I have here given the Publick a brief, but faithful Abstract, of this most excellent Essay; wherein I have all along religiously adhered to our Author's Notions, and generally to his Words, without any other Addition then that of explaining a few necessary Consequences, for the sake of ignorant Readers; For, to those who have the least degree of Learning, I own they will be wholly useless. I hope I have not, in any single Instance, misrepresented the Thoughts of this admirable Writer. If I have happened to mistake through Inadvertency, I entreat he will condescend to inform me, and point out the Place, upon which I will immediately beg Pardon both of him and the World. The Design of his Piece is to recommend Free-thinking, *and one chief Motive is the Example of many Excellent Men who were of that Sect. He produces as the principal Points of their* Free-thinking; *That they denied the Being of a God, the Torments of Hell, the Immortality of the Soul, the Trinity, Incarnation, the History of the Creation by* Moses, *with many other such* fabulous and blasphemous Stories, *as he judiciously calls them: And he asserts, that whoever denies the most of these, is the compleatest* Free-thinker, *and consequently the wisest and most virtuous Man. The Author, sensible of the Prejudices of the Age, does not directly affirm himself an Atheist; he goes no further than to pronounce that Atheism is the most perfect degree of* Free-thinking; *and leaves the Reader to form*

form the Conclusion. However, he seems to allow, that a Man may be a tolerable Free-thinker, *tho' he does believe a God; provided he utterly rejects* Providence, Revelation, the Old and New Testament, Future Rewards *and* Punishments, *the* Immortality of the Soul, *and other the like impossible Absurdities. Which Mark of superabundant Caution, sacrificing* Truth *to the* Superstition *of Priests, may perhaps be* forgiven, *but ought not to be* imitated *by any who would arrive (even in this Author's Judgment) at the true Perfection of* Free-thinking.

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